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Testimony of Representative Ambureen Rana introducing
**LD 1164, An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for the Wabanaki Nations Through
Internet Gaming**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Ambureen Rana, and I represent House District 21 in Bangor.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislative proposal, LD 1164, which would ensure that internet gaming revenue is kept in Maine to benefit Maine communities.

This legislation is about promoting in-state businesses and communities over out-of-state corporations with the goal of improving public health and safety in tribal and non-tribal communities in rural Maine.

Under LD 1164, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation (also called the Wabanaki Nations) would have exclusive rights to operate internet gaming in our state through licenses issued by the Gaming Control Unit.

The Wabanaki Nations will then remit a significant portion of the revenue they generate back to the Gaming Control Unit. This revenue will be distributed into specific State funds for addiction prevention, emergency responses, housing relief and veterans care.

These are sorely needed state revenues at a time when we are in a major budget deficit.

LD 1164 creates a fair and clear framework for internet gaming built on existing infrastructure in Maine, while also bringing much needed economic benefits to the communities of the Wabanaki Nations and the state as a whole.

In order to fully understand these benefits, it's useful to consider the unique status of the Wabanaki Nations, and how this status has created such prevalent economic hardship in the Wabanaki communities and the communities around them.

The vast majority of Native American tribes in this country have seen significant economic growth since the 1980s. This economic boom correlated with increased federal support for tribal sovereignty.

It also correlates with the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, which created a clear regulatory framework for tribal gaming operations that required tribal ownership and control over gaming operations.

As a result, states around the country have seen tribal gaming contribute billions of dollars directly into state and local governments.

The Wabanaki Nations, however, were not beneficiaries of this tribal economic boom. Maine has lost out as a result. While other tribes experienced a 61% growth in per capita income since 1989, the Wabanaki Nations only saw a 9% growth. The average Mainer has seen far more income growth than this over the same period.

A 2022 report by a team of researchers from the Harvard Kennedy School found that the economic growth discrepancy is likely the result of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act or the "Settlement Act."

There is one key difference between all these other tribes, which are themselves extremely diverse, and the Wabanaki Nations. The Wabanaki Nations are subject to the Settlement Act – the rest of the tribes in this country are not.

This means that, unlike the rest of the tribes in this country, the Wabanaki Nations cannot fully participate in federal self-determination programs or operate gaming enterprises under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Because the Wabanaki Nations have not enjoyed anywhere near the level of economic growth as that of other tribes in this country, they face an ongoing economic crisis.

As I understand, the Wabanaki Nations spend a vast majority of their money on delivering essential government services. If they're not able to do so because of financial reasons, their citizens are left without services, or the state ends up expending its resources to deliver the services.

This places more burden on the state's already-strained finances.

LD 1164 is intended to be a step toward addressing these economic issues. As I mentioned earlier, the Wabanaki Nations would be the exclusive operators of internet gaming in Maine.

A significant portion of revenue that the Wabanaki Nations generate will go directly to the state to deal with some of the most pressing issues that our communities face.

Under this framework, the Wabanaki Nations, Maine and our respective communities will be the primary beneficiaries of internet gaming. The revenue that internet gaming generates will stay in Maine, for Mainers.

Compare this to how casino gambling in Maine is currently operating: Maine's two casinos, including Hollywood Casino in my home of Bangor, are owned by private, out-of-state companies.

They remit a portion of their revenue to the state – but everything else goes straight to those out-of-state companies. The revenue benefits the casino owners, not our communities.

The Harvard Report on the Wabanaki Nations found that when tribal communities have stronger financial outlooks, they uplift the non-tribal communities around them. For example, tribes create good-paying jobs for both their members and for non-members, which boosts local economies outside of the tribes' reservations.

This means that all Mainers can benefit from the revenue that the Wabanaki Nations bring in from internet gaming.

More directly, a significant portion of this revenue will go directly back to the state to spend on issues that all Mainers have an interest in.

This includes: preventing and treating addiction to gambling and to opiates; ensuring that our 911 emergency response network is functioning; addressing homelessness and other aspects of the housing crisis; and taking care of our veterans.

I look at the benefits that LD 1164 can bring to my district, to the Wabanaki Nations and to the state as a whole, and I'm proud to voice my support for this legislation.

I respectfully request that you all vote to move LD 1164 out of your committee and onto the floor. Thank you for your time.